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ABSTRACT

Like other women who work in professions dominated by white men, women school superintendents tell stories about rising to influential positions, developing confidence in their authority and ability, yet continuing to confront discriminatory treatment in an occupation structured by gender and racial inequalities. This book examines these contradictory experiences of power and subjection, drawing on interviews with professional women of various ethnic and racial backgrounds who head school systems in rural, small-town, and urban communities across the United States. Part 1 explores cultural and discursive contexts, focusing on the tensions between American culture's emphasis on individual achievement and persistent debates over the causes and meanings of inequality. Part 2, "Narrative Strategies," is comprised of the following narratives: "Highlighting Competence and Excluding Subjection" (Ana Martinez); "Letting Ambition Go and Reconsidering Discrimination" (Denise Nelson); "Uncovering Layers of Vulnerability and Strength" (Margaret Parker); and "Using Professional Power To Overcome Subjection" (Karen Rhodes). Part 3 focuses on the larger story communicated by these four women's narratives. Despite their diversity, a certain commonality connects the narratives. All these superintendents partially dismantle and partially preserve the individualistic, gender- and race-neutral character of the discursive realm of professional work. The book contains chapter notes, an appendix describing the research project, and an index. (MLH)

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